

The End of the World as the Church Used to Know It

By Kleber O. Gonçalves

The cultural shift from the familiar territory of modernity to the unknown land of postmodernity represents a serious threat for the mission of the church in the Western world. Strategy and methods which have been effective in reaching individuals under the modern worldview may not be as effective in reaching communities oriented by the postmodern perspective.

How can the gospel be communicated to individuals who reject the belief in a rational objective truth? How can the Christian witness lead “spiritual” people to Christ who maintain a suspicious attitude towards ex-

ternal authorities—such as the Bible—and who have lost their confidence in organized religion? What are some of the postmodern attitudes that could be used as bridges in reaching the postmodern mind with the gospel? These are some of the questions the church must address as it confronts the emerging postmodern condition.

The purpose of this article, nevertheless, is not to lay out a “how-to-do” model, but rather to begin a discussion concerning some critical issues for Christian mission in an emergent postmodern world and their implications for God’s Kingdom. The second half of this article suggests some principles postmodern-sensitive churches may apply in their attempt to reach the postmodern mind for Christ.

Postmodern-sensitive churches are churches that are conscious of the issues involved in the postmodern condition and are willing to communicate the gospel in ways that are relevant to postmoderns without losing their biblical foundations. Some postmodern churches—even though they seem to be sensitive to the postmodern culture—fail



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to critically distinguish those aspects of postmodernism that are contrary to the biblical perspective. In other words, to become a postmodern-sensitive church does not necessarily mean becoming postmodern.

Critical Issues for the Christian Mission to Postmoderns

The postmodern condition undeniably brings some vital issues for missiology. Shaped by the modern worldview, the church is becoming further ostracized by the postmodern condition. One of the central reasons postmodernism has defied the mission of

consumerism, the temporal shift to the present, the communication shift to cyberspace, and the spatial shift to the *glocal*.

Epistemological Shift to Experience

One of the primary issues in the postmodern debate is that postmoderns demonstrate great interest in the realm beyond knowledge and observation. Postmodernism rejects the modern-based Enlightenment epistemology in which knowledge was seen as certain, objective, and good; and reason was seen as the primary means of attaining knowledge (Grenz 1996:77).

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the Christian church is that the postmodern ethos exposes and repudiates the modern values that have shaped its foundations (see Smith 2001:27-43). Christian mission, particularly in the West, now faces the challenge of how to accept the benefits coming from the decline of the modern worldview without falling into the pitfalls of the postmodern outlook.

Among some of the most critical issues for missions in the postmodern condition are the epistemological shift to experience, the economic shift to

Some aspects of human life, postmoderns argue, cannot be completely understood by reason, especially because reason alone has not been able to give all the answers to life's deepest questions.

As a direct result, a profound skepticism about the capacity of human beings to know anything with certainty has led to the acceptance of additional ways to gain knowledge besides human reason. These involve elements such as instincts, emotions, feelings, and intuitions. Missiologist Craig Van Gelder asserts

that the emerging postmodern generation “trusts its feelings as much or more than it does its thoughts” (2002:499). Hence, postmoderns are more concerned in *experiencing* life rather than *understanding* it.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this epistemological shift to personal experience does not indicate that postmodernism is irrational. Knowledge and logic still have their importance but are no longer the primary focus of attention. In modern times, knowledge was later confirmed by empirical experimentation.

ferent experiences and possibilities, which in most cases simply tend to lead individuals further away from God.

On the one hand, in order to gain the attention of postmoderns—as the Christian mission seeks to effectively communicate with them—the church has to learn how to go beyond just the cognitive level. In today’s context the church must seriously take into consideration the dynamic relationship between the intellectual and experiential dimensions of human life. Postmoderns want to experience what the church

The Enlightenment’s motto *Cogito, ergo sum*, could well be expressed as, *Tesco, ergo sum*: “I shop, therefore I am.”

In the emerging postmodern condition, personal experience is later confirmed by knowledge (Kimball 2003:186). Consequently, decisions postmoderns make are more connected with what they feel than with what they know.

In the context of mission, this epistemological shift to experience has profound implications. This shift affects the way people relate, learn, and communicate—especially in times of mass urbanization and worldwide globalization. Present-day life is crammed full of offers for dif-

has to offer, and as Terry Bowland points out, “If they cannot experience it, chances are they will never accept it” (1999:126). On the other hand, the Christian church must not forget that part of the tragedy in the breakdown of the modern worldview involved the suspicious dualism between thought and emotion. Both are vital in mission and not mutually exclusive.

Here, however, two errors must be avoided. The first is the idea that in order to be relevant in reaching postmoderns the church must offer whatever

they need or want to have an experiential-type of religion. The opposite, and no less dangerous error, is the perception that the church should avoid at all costs any emotional and/or experiential approaches to reach the postmodern mind.

The postmodern quest for experience has to some extent fueled another issue that carries direct missiological implications in reaching postmoderns: consumerism.

Economic Shift to Consumerism

Another remarkable dimension in the shift from modernity to postmodernity is the move from a culture based on production to a culture based on consumption. Although consumption can be found in all human cultures, consumerism has been identified as a postmodern phenomenon and appears as a fundamental characteristic of contemporary Western society (Corrigan 1998). Sociologist Michael Jessup affirms that the postmodern ethos “shapes, forms, and characterizes consumerism” (2001:289). In this new context, the postmodern equivalent to the Enlightenment’s motto *Cogito, ergo sum*, could well be expressed as, *Tesco, ergo sum*: “I shop, therefore I am” (Mercer 1995:325).

Postmodern consumerism is marked by the constant expansion of marketing and advertising tools in the effort to establish and control markets, and is also an

active process to create pleasure and meaning as a new source in finding one’s personal identity through a personal experience with the product. Phillip Sampson notes:

Goods are valued for what they mean as much as for their use, and people find meaning in the very act of consumption. Advertising and product image become goods consumed for their own sake, rather than as representative of real products (1994:31).

Consequently, especially among the young postmodern generation, the way they consume is a fundamental part of the kind of persons they are, and the kind of persons they represent to others. This emerging generation is looking for services and products that will do something for them, making them feel or look better in order to be accepted within their own circle of relationships. Graham Cray suggests then, that shopping malls may well symbolize a new form of postmodern community where ultimately people interact with each other only in order to satisfy their built-in continuous stimulated addiction to buy the “latest” available product in the market (1998:5).

The fundamental core value and belief of a postmodern consumer society, thus, becomes *personal choice* where the basic assumption is that anyone can accomplish whatever one sets one’s mind to. It all becomes just a matter of personal choice. As a result, a new shape of indi-

vidualism arises, one that leads to isolation; which in turn, goes back to consumerism as a way to suppress the negative effects of loneliness. Randy Frazee notes, "The more we are obsessed about applying consumerism as a solution to our loneliness, the more it feeds the individualism mindset" (Frazee 2001:179). It eventually becomes a vicious cycle.

Consumerism also has a spiritual—or rather an anti-spiritual—dimension. A sociological study done by Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang presents the spiritual consequences of a consumer society.

Pleasure lies at the heart of consumerism. It finds in consumerism a unique champion *which promises to liberate it both from its bondage of sin, duty and morality as well as its ties to faith, spirituality and redemption*. Consumerism proclaims pleasure not merely as the right of every individual but also as every individual's obligation to him or herself. . . . The pursuit of pleasure, untarnished by guilt or shame, becomes the new image of the good life (Gabriel and Lang 1995:100, emphasis added).

Churches and mission organizations must be careful not to fall in the societal pattern of postmodern consumerism, where "the customer reigns supreme and products must be shaped to suit their wishes" (Dowsett 2000:459). Unfortunately, numerous Christians have followed this path. Concerned with this type of behavior, Jimmy Long notes, "Instead of becoming part

of one Christian community, they attend two or more churches in a quest to have personal needs met. Thus they remain spectators or consumers in each church" (1997:97). What will be the motivation to engage in mission to the emerging postmodern generation? If Christian mission aligns itself with the consumer mentality its methods and strategies may become increasingly based on personal choice rather than following God's command to make disciples of all peoples (Matt 28:19-20).

Temporal Shift to the Present

In contrast with the premodern and modern worldviews, where the pre-modern was established on a shared sense of belief in the traditional authority of the past, and the modern on a personal conviction in the ideological progress in the future, the postmodern condition is marked by disillusionment about what went before and uncertainty about what lies ahead. Graham Cray notes, "Postmodernity has lost the certainty of its hope for the future and has failed to rediscover any coherent sense of rootedness in the past" (1998:7). Postmoderns seem to be uncertain of where they have come from and where they are going.

Since the postmodern condition tends to emphasize the present as the most important dimension of human life, the "now" becomes all that exists and all that matters. This fact, af-

firms Craig Van Gelder, "results in a loss of historical perspective and awareness of the contingent character of all human existence" (1996:160). In the postmodern condition, people tend to think less in terms of the consequences related to their decisions and actions; thus, the concepts of morality and accountability are directly affected (Guder 1998:45). Moreover, an unbalanced emphasis on the present dimension may lead to critical issues about personal and communal identities which are intrinsically related to one's past history. Nick Mercer states:

communal identity postmoderns face the danger of attempting to define themselves only through "the means available to them within popular culture" (Smith 2001:162). Additionally, the focus on the "present" leads many postmoderns to experience a loss of future direction and a diminished sense of hope and purpose; thus, creating a negativistic view of human life.

A further implication of a culture of the present lies in the increasing use of cyberspace as the "bridge between the ephemeral and the eternal" (Beaudoin 1998:46), in an attempt to fill

Cyberspace has become the post-modern communication mechanism *par excellence*.

Postmodernity espouses a new consciousness of time and space, a new way of relating to how things were and of the spaces in which we live and interact. Everything is in effect viewed through the timeless "here and now." There is no history and no future. This is not the existentialist "now" of self-authentication through decision. This is an acknowledgement that all history is a history of the present (1995:333).

One of the most critical consequences for mission arising from the excessive emphasis on the present dimension of the human existence is that in their search for personal and

the vacuum caused by an excessive emphasis on the "now" as the only vital dimension of human life.

*Communication Shift
to Cyberspace*

In attempting to relevantly address the postmodern condition, the church must engage in effective communication, especially because communication has always influenced the way the church proclaims its message. The Western world, however, is undergoing one of the most significant revolutions in human history, namely, a

communications revolution. Technological developments in communications have advanced with an amazing speed during the last few decades with the increasingly integration of computer systems to communications media. British economist Frances Cairncross affirms that the current communications revolution “will be among the most important forces shaping . . . society in the next fifty years or so” (2001:2).

In the modern world, communication occurred mostly through cognitive and propositional knowledge. Words, both in oral and written forms, were the dominant medium of communication. In the postmodern world, communications media has shifted to a more interactive form that generates knowledge through personal experience and participation (see Webber 1999:37, 105). Unquestionably, this shift carries overwhelming implications for the mission of the Christian church in an emergent postmodern condition. Lewis Drummond asserts that “despite the complexity of the issue, the obstacle that communication presents to mission can be described quite simply as the need of the church to get on the communicative wavelength of this new segment of society” (2002:120).

In this context, cyberspace has become the postmodern communication mechanism *par excellence*, especially because of its strong influence on the emerg-

ing postmodern generation. Even though the internet and the world wide web were used in the late 1980s and early 1990s, involvement with these communications media can be seen as results of two older technologies: (1) the personal computer and (2) the video-game. The first generation of postmoderns grew up bonding with these machines, and their fast adaptation to cyberspace is directly linked to these technological developments (Beaudoin 1998:43).

Never before has any new invention come from obscurity to global prominence in such a rapid fashion. Cyberspace, Cairncross says, offers “a world in which transmitting information costs almost nothing, in which distance is irrelevant, and in which any amount of content is instantly accessible” (2001:76). Furthermore, cyberspace is also seen as a powerful tool for social change among postmoderns (see Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer 2003:155-156).

Cyberspace embodies the postmodern ethos in at least two ways. First, it creates a virtual reality, where the postmodern spirit of fiction blurred with reality is easily achieved. In virtual reality, there are no temporal or spatial barriers; and anyone can be anywhere, at any time. Second, cyberspace employs a characteristic that captures the attention of individuals who search for a virtual reality experience: speed. The quest for “perfect” speed in the cyberspace en-

vironment, notes Tom Beaudoin, “would guarantee the most ‘real’ simulation possible and would therefore enable full presence in a realm that lies beyond the limits of reality” (1998:87).

Therefore, in emerging post-modern societies, the church must be open to cyberspace as a new delivery system of information. But at the same time, it must be aware that the more electronically connected people become, the more personally disconnected they might be. In the postmodern quest for an online experience to satisfy the

designates and defines the interaction between global influences and local contexts.

[Glocality] requires continuous interactions of both local and global and their frequent merging of boundaries. . . . Glocality covers a wide range of concerns from poverty, the environment and quality of life, to problems relating to subalternization, as well as new directions in urbanism, architecture and the arts. The driving force is creative rebelliousness with strong commitments to social justice. The solution is pluralistic and its main characteristic is tolerance of differences (Lim 2001:xv).

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loneliness of an off-line existence, it is the responsibility of the church to provide relevant options to postmoderns in their use of cyberspace. Additionally, as the bits of cyberspace proliferate throughout the world, the spatial dimensions of the local and global elements merge even closer with each other.

*Spatial Shift
to the Glocal*

Another aspect that brings significant implications to mission in a postmodern society comes together with the widespread impact of globalization: the concept of glocality. Glocality

The implication of glocality in the context of Christian mission to a postmodern condition is extremely significant. While the general impact of glocality is still to be fully felt, its emergence cannot be denied. “As the world gets smaller,” notes Robert Jeffery, “there is a strong attempt to reassert the local, the tribal, and the distinctive culture, albeit in a different form. . . . Globalization thus does not undermine distinctive cultures; rather it gives them a new significance” (2002:195). Thus, there is a greater need to support local communities and their distinctive characteristics.

Postmoderns recognize that in a global community the local identity cannot be neglected. This fact is noticeable in trends such as fashion, entertainment, and music where there are strong links between the local and the global which reinforce the concept of glocality. Emerging postmodern generations no longer perceive reality only in terms of their local context. They are locally sensitive as well as globally aware.

In its attempt to reach postmoderns, the church needs, therefore, to understand and realize its responsibility in connecting and affirming postmoderns in both the local and global concerns they may espouse. Here, Christian mission has the opportunity to express its global nature in the context of a local community.

Suggestive Principles for Postmodern-Sensitive Churches

The gap between cross-cultural missionaries and the culture intended to be reached can only be bridged by a careful use of communication. Similarly, if the church is to be successful in communicating the gospel to postmoderns, it is essential to understand the postmodern outlook and some of the principles that may be used to bring about a dialogue. The second half of this article suggests selected principles that should be taken into consideration in reaching the postmodern mind with the gospel.

Among them are the communal, experiential, integrational, and storytelling principles.

Communal Principle

In 1989, missiologist David Bosch, reflecting on the conference of the World Council of Churches Commission for World Mission and Evangelism in San Antonio, Texas, observed the vital need for concrete considerations—by the church—on the issue of community. He prudently wrote, “The search for community will turn out to be a major missiological theme during the 1990s” (Bosch 1989:137). Two years later, with the emergence of the postmodern condition in mind, Bosch reinforced this concern in his masterpiece, *Transforming mission*, declaring that “it is the *community* that is the primary bearer of mission” (1991:472). In addition to that, in 1995, at the end of his posthumously published book on a missiology for Western culture, Bosch also wrote:

In the context of the secularized, post-Christian West our witness will be credible only if it flows from a *local, worshipping community*. . . . The question about the feasibility of a missionary enterprise to Western people hinges on the question of the nature and life of our local worshipping communities and the extent to which they facilitate a discourse in which the engagement of people with their culture is encouraged (1995:59-60, original emphasis).

Undoubtedly, Bosch was contemplating what would be one of

the greatest needs of emerging postmodern generations. The recognition of the failure of the modern cult of the individual was then paving the way to the awareness of the importance of community. In what seemed like a contradiction, postmoderns began to demonstrate the need to have individualistic freedom, but in the context of community. Van Gelder affirms:

Persons shaped by the postmodern [perspective] tend to be on a journey that is seeking community. The promise of the Enlightenment to produce an emancipated freedom for the self-authenticated, rational individual has become the iron cage

The postmodern condition has been marked by the heart-felt effects of dysfunctional family circumstances, which have largely led the younger postmodern generation to search for alternative places to belong. In most cases, this is a search for intimacy—a search for family and/or friends. However, the intimacy postmoderns are looking for has a horizontal dimension, toward human relationships, and a vertical dimension, toward the sacred or the spiritual. From the perspective of Christian mission, therefore, the postmodern quest for spirituality is ultimately the search for a relationship with

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of individualism in the postmodern world, where any sense of personal identity or meaning has collapsed. For many of these persons, this has resulted in a renewed desire to discover, locate, and belong to community (2002:498).

In other words, the postmodern generation is more open to relationships than ever before, moving away from the individualism of the Enlightenment-shaped modern worldview and moving towards a postmodern communal attitude. In this context, and viewed from a mission perspective, the postmodern quest for relationships is one of fundamental importance.

God, which in turn, is the experience of belonging to the community of God's followers—the church (Grenz 1999:46).

One word of caution is needed here: in order to fulfill God's commission, it becomes essential that postmodern-sensitive churches come to understand not only its intrinsic missionary nature, but also its communal identity. The church, then, ought to function as a community of belonging (see Rice 2002). George Hunsberger notes, "The recovery of being community is fundamental for the church at the present time. The new arising generation certainly will not tolerate anything

less" (2002:97). Especially because of the growing indifference with institutionalized religion, postmoderns are looking for a community to belong to, before they find a message to believe in. Richard Rice states:

Belonging is the most important element in the Christian life. It takes priority over believing and behaving. Beliefs and practices are essential to Christian experience, of course, but its central feature, the most important and comprehensive element, is sharing in the life of the community (2002:204).

In community, therefore, postmoderns may experience what they are exposed to believe, and then, they may decide to affirm that belief publicly and to follow Christ intentionally. In the meantime, they are looking for an accepting, secure place to expand their own identity in the context of community. With the concept of Christian community in mind, the mission of the church to postmoderns must have a different methodology and focus. The church needs to employ a much more relational/communal approach. If this principle is taken seriously, the development of authentic Christian communities, through local postmodern-sensitive churches will be the basic relational foundation for mission and the basic framework for ministry in a post-modern environment.

Experiential Principle

As already mentioned above, the quest for experiential spiritu-

ality is one of the characteristic trends in the Western world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Postmoderns are looking for spiritual experiences. However, this apparent interest in spiritual issues tends to have more to do with one's personal feeling rather than interest in spiritual truths. Postmoderns may be very interested in exploring the things that trouble them in their hearts, but they may not be so interested in developing beliefs for their mind.

The church, therefore, ought to take into consideration the development of spiritual experiences that are tangible and real. Sharing our personal experience with God may be more effective than trying to convince people they must believe in Jesus or in the Bible. Thus, as Richardson vehemently points out, for the postmodern mind "*experience comes before explanation*" (2000:51, original emphasis). Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that experience does not suppress explanation. It just comes before. A postmodern-sensitive approach to mission should not become anti-intellectual and totally renounce what has been achieved during the development of the modern worldview.

In this new context for mission, the church ought to provide the environment in which sharing one's personal experience with God may be discerned in a tangible way. To this end, the use of visual, symbolic,

and interactive forms of communications become of great significance to the mission of the church in the emerging postmodern condition.

While in the modern world the main processes of communication were word-based, in the postmodern condition they are image-based. Postmoderns, contends Rodney Clapp, “increasingly turn away from the printed word and books, and turn to the power of the photographed, televised and digitalized image” (2000:102). In the emerging postmodern culture,

traditional manner, by insisting on the use of words alone. Since the emerging postmodern condition produces people who learn visually via television, films, and the internet, the church must incorporate visual elements, not as substitute for words but in support of words.

The lesson for the church is straightforward: images create emotions, and postmodern generations will respond to the experience they generate. “The old paradigm taught that if you have the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm

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therefore, the use of metaphors and the search for visual concepts are primary elements in the process of communication, in the same way principles and cognitive propositions were to the modern era. Leonard Sweet asserts, “Propositions are lost on postmodern ears; but metaphors they will hear, images they will see and understand” (1999:34).

In the present image-driven environment, however, the church by and large has not begun to address this communication trend adequately. In many cases, churches are still addressing postmoderns in the

says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching” (Anderson 1992:21).

Sight, nevertheless, is only one of the elements postmodern-sensitive churches should take advantage of in providing an experiential encounter with God. In an increasingly image-driven Western society, pioneering mission approaches to postmoderns have employed what has been called a “total” or “multi-sensorial” experience in order to bring about relevance and attract the postmodern mind to the gospel message (see Kimball 2004).

Simply put, throughout Scripture, God used multi-sensorial events to enhance verbal teaching. The biblical worship experience—as represented both in the Old Testament sanctuary and in the temple in Jerusalem—was much more than just listening to the words of a message being delivered. These worship experiences portrayed graphic representations of color, taste, smell, space, and action in worship (Exod 25-28; Num 16; and Rev 4).

In practical terms, multi-sensory worship includes seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and experiencing. In the quest to provide an environment in which an experiential/multi-sensorial experience of God is achievable, postmodern-sensitive churches should involve reflection, silence, singing, preaching, and the use of arts in their worship services.

Integrational Principle

Although human beings were created as whole persons, with physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions, the modern era divided every aspect of human life into specializations resulting in a fragmented and disconnected society. This fact is even more remarkable among postmoderns. For this reason, postmoderns place a great deal of importance in approaching human life as a whole, as they seek to entail every dimension of human life in their personal experience. The postmodern perspective, Harry Poe writes, “has rejected the seg-

mentation of knowledge and the segmentation of experience. Integration and holistic thinking have become hallmarks of the emerging postmodern mind” (2001:28). Postmoderns long for this kind of integration. Truth as a mere philosophical and conceptual notion detached from feeling and action is meaningless to them.

Therefore, an integrational approach to mission becomes a primordial element in addressing the longings of postmoderns. This approach, nevertheless, cannot be disassociated from the genuine presence of the church in their own context. Only when the church is real and present, a basic characteristic that postmoderns are looking for, will authenticity be revealed.

Authenticity is indispensable for emerging postmodern generations, and it only becomes a reality when the church is real and present. In the postmodern context, this “presence” is what missiologists refer to as incarnational ministry. It simply means that the church must become part of the community it seeks to reach. The church must be sensitive to postmoderns, being willing to meet them on their own territory, and ready to communicate the gospel in a way they can understand. In the postmodern condition, however, real presence is hardly achieved without a relationship of trust coming from the church.

Because of their skepticism towards authority and authority structures, postmoderns must see the claims of Christianity

through individuals who may gradually earn their trust and respect. Accordingly, Chuck Smith writes, postmoderns “simply want to see a real, honest-to-goodness Christian, someone who truly follows the merciful, compassionate, healing example of Jesus Christ” (2001:196). For them, the church does not need to be perfect; it only needs to be authentic.

In its attempt to reach postmoderns, postmodern-sensitive churches should concentrate far more on an integrational approach employing relationships that produce trust, rather than aggressive outreach that seeks immediate decisions. The mes-

ligious needs such as the need for meaning and purpose in life, the need to make a contribution, and the need to be needed. Here, short-term missions are a powerful instrument to engage postmoderns in service. Postmoderns enjoy traveling; consequently, to go into another cultural environment and to experience God in practical ways is a remarkable opportunity to get the attention of the postmodern mind. Furthermore, when postmoderns place their hands in a project, their mind and hearts are undividedly attached to their service.

As postmoderns see that authentic faith produces genuine ser-

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sage communicated by the life and presence of the local church becomes more important to postmoderns than the message it simply delivers in words.

To this end, the integrational principle also includes providing postmoderns the opportunity to serve others—their community and their world—through the church. Postmoderns, Jim Kitchens argues, are “interested in finding a place to commit their lives and to make a difference in the world” (2003:71). Even through non-religious language postmoderns express their re-

vice, the validity of the Christian faith is confirmed, and the particular experience of serving others may lead them further in their journey with Christ. The church, therefore, must provide opportunities to challenge postmoderns to engage in service to their local and global communities.

Storytelling Principle

In ancient societies, the use of narratives was one of the vital elements in organizing life. Similarly, for several hundred years Western culture was based on biblical tradition and guided by

the all-encompassing narrative of God's actions in human history. During the development of the Enlightenment-based modern worldview, however, the secularization of historical narratives drastically reduced the importance of stories in bringing meaning to peoples' lives (Grenz 2001:90-91).

The secularization of historical narratives brings even more disturbing consequences to postmodern cultures. For the postmodern mind, there is no overarching story (metanarrative) that explains every aspect of human life. On the contrary, postmoderns assert there are now several contradictory stories where none of them is less or more valid than others. Van Gelder concurs.

Persons shaped by the postmodern culture have grown skeptical of principles, rules, and laws that are abstracted into truths that must be obeyed or followed. . . . The embeddedness of human knowledge and the perspectival character of all knowing mean that understanding is rooting within a narrative—a story What presents a challenge is the fact that we are adrift in a postmodern sea of competing stories, all of which are perceived as being socially constructed and relative (2002:498-499).

Ultimately, the dilemma for mission centers on the Christian claim concerning the moral universality of God's story, which is perceived as invalid by the postmodern ethos. Narratives are still valid in the postmodern concep-

tion, but they are only seen as local rather than universal. Hence, postmoderns have been affected by the impoverishment and loss of the sense of identity in living without a connection with a larger, all-embracing story.

Because human beings were created with curiosity, complexity, and a profound need for meaning, the postmodern longing to understand the bigger questions of life has paved the way to the use of storytelling as an effective instrument in reaching the postmodern mind. Because life for them is itself a drama or narrative, one of the major concerns in the postmodern mindset turns around the development of stories that can define personal identity and give purpose and shape to social existence within a given community.

Furthermore, human cognition is based on storytelling, as it is recognized as one of the fundamental instruments of human thought. In their groundbreaking study about the influence of storytelling, Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley (1998) suggest that stories have the power to engage our minds especially because our own existence is organized in narrative form.

Additionally, storytelling is a significant instrument to establish meaning and integrate one's past and future with what is observed to be happening in the present. In other words, storytelling is a primary way of human expression of who we are, where we came from, and what we an-

ticipate in our lives. Therefore, the human search for identity clearly requires, in greater or lesser degree, the unfolding of our origins. Here, the ultimate human search for identity can only be found in the Creator, the original source of human life (Ps 139:13-14). Here, a natural bridge exists for the proclamation of the gospel to the postmodern mind as a narrative story (Van Gelder 2002:498). In God's story about life and its meaning, postmoderns can ultimately come to understand themselves and the world around them in their pursuit for personal and communal identity.

will not be simply accomplished through more traditional approaches of communication.

Postmodern-sensitive churches, therefore, should provide opportunities in which individual stories can be compared and transformed by God's story, the narrative of the Scriptures. This may happen when the church helps postmoderns understand the bigger picture of God's actions in history and how it interconnects with their own story. When God's story begins to challenge the personal and local stories of postmoderns, their minds will be touched in a place where previously rejected cogni-

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In this new cultural context, a new approach in communicating the gospel becomes imperative. In spite of their rejection of meta-narratives, postmoderns place a high value on the power of story. Storytelling creates experiences, and these experiences will more effectively address the concerns of human life inviting those who share these experiences to a real and active involvement in the story told. Thus, experience and storytelling go hand-in-hand in developing confidence in postmoderns, which in most cases

tive information and facts have been kept, and transformation can eventually take place. At this point, when postmoderns identify the great Storyteller (cf. Matt 13) and align their own story to his purposes, only then, should the church challenge the postmodern assumption that metanarratives are invalid. Here it is important to note that the church will find little success if it challenges the postmodern rejection of metanarratives prior to the experience God's story can create in the postmodern mind. It is more appropriate

to let God's story gain credibility for itself, as the Holy Spirit works to bring the postmodern heart to the point of serious reflection about the Christian faith. Mark Miller asks:

Do we trust our people [postmodern seekers] and the Holy Spirit enough to allow them to think for themselves? Can we leave something open-ended, knowing the conclusion might not come until later that day, week, month, or year? (2004:41).

These are serious questions the Christian church must be able to answer if inclusive to its mission is the desire to guide the postmodern mind and heart to a salvific relationship with Christ.

culture based on experience; from a culture based on production, to a culture based on consumption; from a culture based on the confidence in the future, to a culture based on pessimism towards the present (and many times ignorance of the past!); from a culture based on words, to a culture based on bits; and, from a culture based on the local or the global, to a culture based on the *glocal*. Certainly, all of the above paradigm shifts represent profound implications for the mission of the Christian church.

On the other hand, the postmodern condition seems to be receptive to some principles that

In the postmodern search for authenticity, the church ought to be a place of real service to others.

Conclusions

The paradigm shift from a modern to a postmodern world is a moment of uncertainty and, at the same time, replete with challenges and opportunities for Christian mission. The emerging postmodern condition especially calls for a reassessment of the church's strategy and methods, which were previously developed to reach individuals oriented by the modern worldview.

On the one hand, the transition from a modern to postmodern world also reveals a shift from a culture based on reason, to a

might be employed by postmodern-sensitive churches in Western postmodernizing contexts. In the postmodern search to belong, the church ought to be the community of belonging. In the postmodern search for images, the church ought to be a place of multi-sensorial experiences. In the postmodern search for authenticity, the church ought to be a place of real service to others. In the postmodern search for identity, the church ought to provide the grand story that will ultimately transform the postmodern mind by Christ and for his church.

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